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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the relationship between black adolescents' performance on school measures of success, particularly as this performance is perceived to be indicative of their intellectual and academic capabilities and their group identity. The paper's basic premise is that many black adolescents have made the decision not to seek assimilation into the dominant structures of the social system; rather, they adopt "cultural inversion," a cultural innovation in which group solidarity, advancement, and identity take precedence over individual achievement and/or mobility. First, theoretical and ethnographic literature on how a social group might respond to domination is reviewed. The educational implications of cultural inversion are then discussed from a cross-cultural perspective. Following this, it is asserted that cultural inversion is a prevalent response of black adolescents in the school context, and that it has widespread implications in that it reinforces and encourages "nonlearning." Ethnographic evidence is presented to support this assertion. In conclusion, the paper suggests that the phenomenon of cultural inversion may explain why remedial programs, including school desegregation which is intended to eliminate cultural groups, do not facilitate higher school performance. (Author/GC)

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CULTURAL INVERSION AND BLACK CHILDREN'S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

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In this paper I am concerned with the relationship between Black adolescents' performance on school measures of success, particularly as this performance is perceived to be indicative of their intellectual and academic capabilities, and their group identity. I begin with two assumptions: First, in social systems characterized by racial, ethnic or social stratification, individuals can either seek to become assimilated or they can respond to the existing social reality by refusing to seek assimilation in the existing social structure. My second assumption is that once a group has made the choice between assimilation and non-assimilation, they then structure their internal and external social relationships to reinforce that decision. My basic premise is that many Black adolescents have made the decision not to seek assimilation into the dominant structure of the social system. This non-assimilation decision has necessitated the development of an innovation which I am here labeling cultural inversion. Operationally defined as a cultural innovation in which group solidarity, advancement and identity take precedence over individual achievement and/or mobility, cultural inversion is perceived as a response to the structural limitations inherent in the dominant social structure. A second premise is that insufficient attention has been given to the factors generating and perpetuating this phenomenon in the Black community, particularly as it affects school performance and behavior. This paper employs the concept of cultural inversion both to describe the distinctive aspects of Black cultural discontinuities and to explore their implications for schooling, with supportive ethnographic data from the author's current research and other sources.

The paper is divided into 5 sections. In the first section of the paper I shall briefly review the theoretical and ethnographic literature on how a

social group might respond to domination in order to establish a conceptual framework. In the second section, I shall review the educational implications of cultural inversion from a cross-cultural perspective. I suggest in the third section that this response, i.e. cultural inversion, is the more prevalent response of Black adolescents in the school context and, more importantly, it has widespread implications for Black school performance in that it reinforces and encourages what DeVos (1980, 1982) labels nonlearning. The fourth part of the paper briefly considers ethnographic evidence from the author's current field work, presenting preliminary findings of ongoing research. Finally, the concluding section of the paper offers a summary. I shall begin the analysis by briefly reviewing the theoretical and ethnographic literature on how various social groups respond to domination and conquest.

I. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Wallace (1973), when a social system or a social group within a social system experiences extensive, sudden and unplanned social change, its equilibrium is disrupted. He notes that such widespread changes produce disorganization. Disorganization in a social system may be the outcome, he claims, of a number of forces, including "internal conflict among interest groups, which results in extreme disadvantage for at least one group, and very commonly, a position of perceived subordination and inferiority with respect to an adjacent society" (Wallace 1973:470). The fact that one segment of the population perceives itself to occupy an inferior status vis-a-vis an adjacent group leads its members, according to Wallace, to become "culturally disillusioned", to come to view the world as "unpredictable or barren in its simplicity". Further, Wallace maintains that individuals experiencing disorganization are likely to show evidence of "panic-stricken anxiety, shame, guilt, depression, or apathy"

(Wallace 1973:470). It is his view that people sharing this perception are more likely to engage in pathological activities.

While all social systems are constantly changing, it is the "violent fluctuations" and not the "periods of stable moving equilibrium" which produce a change in the cultural configuration. One way to end the attendant cultural disorganization is through what Wallace (1973) describes as revitalization movements.

Revitalization movements are "deliberate, organized attempts by some members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture by rapid acceptance of a pattern of multiple innovations" (Wallace 1970:188; 1973:470). The acceptance of these cultural innovations is vital to the elimination of the cultural distortion rampant in the social system. According to Wallace (1973), revitalization processes are dependent upon the successful completion of five basic functions: (1) formulation of a code which establishes a utopian blueprint of a new sociocultural organization; (2) communication which is intended to produce converts; (3) an organization which is divided into two basic groups: "a set of disciples" who comprise the executive organization and a set of mass followers who not only practice the utopian code but also act as models for the new converts; (4) adaptation which suggests that the code is frequently reworked, if necessary, in order to ensure the continued existence of the movement; and (5) cultural transformation which occurs if the movement is able to convert a large segment of the affected population as well as a significant portion of the functionally crucual apparatus". The success of the revitalization movement will be evident in the "drastic decline of the quasi-pathological individual symptoms of anomie and by the disappearance of the cultural distortions".

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Wallace's analysis of a group's probable response to rapid social change is useful in that it deals primarily with situations of cultural disorganization, of which social movement is a solution. Cultural inversion may be a component of a revitalization movement, but only where no cultural disorganization is present. On the other hand, among the problems associated with Wallace's analysis is the fact that it does not make allowances for different types of responses to cultural change.

If one wants to look at different kinds of responses to rapid social change, one can look at Robert Merton's (1968) multi-solutions to group problems. He rejects the notion that nonconforming behavior is evidence of a group's pathological nature. Instead he argues that nonconforming behavior is more prevalent in social groups where, due to the limitations inherent in the social structure, the ideals espoused by the society as being available to all are least likely to be realized. This, he maintains, is not indicative of a group's inability to control biological urges, but is instead a normal response to its ecological conditions. theless, he admits that even though a particular social group may generally respond in a particular manner to the perceived limitations of the system, a range of responses are available to the individual members of the group.

Individuals who are dominated in socially or racially stratified societies can either become assimilated or they can respond to the existing social reality and refuse all efforts geared toward assimilation. Merton (1968) notes that there are at least five (5) possible types of individual adaptations. They are: (1) Conformity, which is the more prevalent response and a necessary condition for the continued existence of the society. This response occurs when it is believed that there is a mesh between cultural goals and

institutionalized means. (2) Innovation. This response, according to Merton (1968:195), is more likely to occur when the individual has internalized the "cultural emphasis upon the goals of the society without equally internalizing the institutional norms governing ways and means for its attainment". (3) Ritualism. This adaptive response is more likely to occur in a social system where "one's status is largely dependent upon one's achievement." It is the process whereby the individual lowers her aspirations or culturally approved goals of great financial success and upward mobility but, at the same time, the individual religiously retains her commitment to the institutional norms of the society. (4) Retreatism. This response, in Merton's view, is the least popular response to domination. Individuals utilizing this response have often internalized both the cultural goals and the institutional practices. The problem here is that the individual is not, despite his/her commitment to these goals and practices, successful. Unable to obtain the legitimate means to success and also unable to accept the illegitimate route(s) to success, the individual drops out. Merton notes that this escape enables him to eliminate the conflict. (5) Rebellion. This response leads the individual to reject the existing social structure and to offer a more equitable social system in which there is a "closer correspondence between merit, effort and reward".

The major problem with Merton's (1968) analysis is that he limits his discussion to the range of responses available to those persons who are an integral part of the social system and who, during periods of rapid social change, respond as innovators, rebels, etc. His analysis does not account for the responses of those persons who are, based on their social status, excluded from the center of the system but who are, at the same time, subjected to the same cultural goals as those persons whose group membership confers on them greater access to the valued social goals.

Unlike Merton (1968), Philip Mayer's (1961, 1962) analysis deals with those persons who are excluded from the social system but who are, at the same time, a part of it. In a classic study of culturally similar social groups experiencing the same or very similar conditions of conquest and domination in South Africa, Mayer (1961, 1962) found basically two components of the same dominated community responding to it quite differently. The School people were strong advocates of assimilation and, as much as they could, relinquished the norms, values and belief system of their traditional culture and replaced those cultural features with those condoned by the European or dominating culture. This they did in order to enhance their economic potential in the urbanized European community and also because they equated technological and administrative superiority with cultural superiority. Unlike the School people, the Red people sought to retain the indigenous culture of their ancestors despite the intrusion of the British and other Europeans. For the Red people, a "good" Red man "values the ways of the ancestors, 'who like people to go on living in the way they themselves used to live'". Mayer notes that this orientation was equated with "tribal loyalty". Hence, the response of the two groups to the pervasive conquest and domination was quite dissimilar, leading invariably to two different perceptions of the problems facing the dominated population. The School people, for example, argued that the Black Africans could change their existing conditions if only they would convert to Christianity and take advantage of the European system of schooling. On the contrary, the Red people argued that it was the arrival and the conquest of the Europeans that was the basis of the problems confronting the Black South African community.

Another ethnographic study of a people's response to oppression is MacCrone's (1947) study of the attitudes of the dominated groups in South

Africa. In one of the first psychological studies of South Africa, MacCrone (1947), using a life history technique, concludes that the "reaction to domination (of the Black population in South Africa) was one of 'counter-domination' through which, in aggression, suspicion, and dislike, the individuals expressed their resistance" to their existing social conditions. Moreover, since they were unable to publicly and overtly display their displeasure with their ecological conditions, MacCrone maintains that they turned their aggression inwards or found expression in acceptable techniques--"ridicule, non-cooperation, rejection of the White man and those things associated with him" (MacCrone cited in Geber and Newman 1980; see also Carter 1979; Gallimore, Boggs and Jordan 1974; DeVos 1980, 1982). Hence the need to camouflage their true feelings heightened the engendered hostility while at the same time minimizing tribal or ethnic differences and developing instead a "racial" or national identity. MacCrone's (1947, 1975) study of the response of the dominated groups of South Africa to conquest and domination suggests subtle opposition which can be continuous rather than explicit rebellion which can be suppressed. Essentially this subtle opposition is the means by which the dominated group maintains itself.

In summary, the subtle opposition of cultural inversion appears to be a frequent response to conquest and domination. Unable to overtly display their displeasure or opposition to the social structure which limits their obtainment of the most highly valued social goals, those social groups excluded from the cultural center of the social system frequently resort to methods which are considered inappropriate by the conquering group (see Merton 1968), but which at the same time enable the dominated to retain some sense of self-respect and group identity. A discussion of how this phenomenon affects school performance from a cross-cultural perspective follows.

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II. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL INVERSION

A review of the ethnographic literature suggests that the subtle opposition of cultural inversion extends to the system of schooling in contexts characterized by conquest and domination. Since schooling in such settings is usually controlled by the dominant group, the response of adolescents who are members of disparaged groups is frequently at variance with the socially defined norms of the school. Their unwillingness to submit to the dominant group's definition of them leads them to resistance, non-cooperation, and rejection of those things considered indigenous to the dominating population(s). This rejection of the dominant culture, including the system of schooling, may be nominally transmitted by the adult members of the dominated or disparaged groups who frequently view themselves as "communities-in-exile". A few examples should be illuminating.

In a study of Mexican-Americans' reaction to schools and schooling, Carter (1979) found large numbers of Mexican-American children reacting to the perceived barriers to employment and a disparaged social position by participating in a phenomenon which he calls "mental withdrawal". In Carter's (1979) view, "mental withdrawal" implies lack of effort in the school context. Hence their low performance on school measures of success is not necessarily indicative of their academic and/or intellectual capabilities, but rather an indication of their non-cooperation and rejection of the assimilation ideology of the school. This subtle opposition to their disparaged status in the social system diminishes their academic effort, beginning after the primary grades and continuing this steady downward trend as they continue through high school or until they leave school. While this same phenomenon has been observed in other similarly disparaged social groups (see DeVos 1980, 1982; Ogbu 1974, 1978; Gallimore,

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Boggs and Jordan 1974; Howard 1974), Carter (1979) attributes this diminishing of academic effort among Mexican-Americans to, among other things, an uneven historical record of the relationship between school performance and subsequent job status. In other words, Mexican-Americans are not allowed to compete for jobs based solely on their academic training and abilities.

Like Carter, DeVos (1982) notes the lower performance of Mexican-Americans as they go through school. However, unlike Carter, he attributes the school performance differential to the inhibitive influence of the peer group on formal learning in the school context. Further, he insists that in his observation of incarcerated Mexican-American youth, he was struck by the strong emphasis, in the peer group, on affiliative rather than individual concerns. This orientation in the school context placed heavy sanctions "against individual attempts at learning". Indeed, he concludes that "those (Mexican-Americans) who are good students have to resist strong group pressure" (DeVos 1982:94).

Still another example of the range of options available to social groups experiencing and/or with a social heritage of conquest and domination is the "culturally Hawaiian" child. As DeVos (1982) notes, the category "Hawaiian" includes all persons with some trace of Hawaiian ancestry. However, it is those children who refuse to relinquish their cultural traditions and consequently who are less assimilated that tend to "show the greatest difficulty in formal school settings". Indeed, DeVos (1982) cites Howard as having found that such children are socialized in ways that differ from that of their less traditional peers. As with their more assimilated peers, the Hawaiian language and other institutionalized aspects of Hawaiian culture have disappeared. Nevertheless, "they (the less assimilated) had been socialized in ways that deemphasized individual competitive behavior and stressed the positive social

virtues of peer-group affiliation" (Howard, cited in DeVos 1982:94). DeVos (1982) goes on to show how these cultural discontinuities impede the learning process in the formal school setting which expects students to "learn individually and to take on the competitive pattern" endemic to American society.

In summary, if one can generalize from the ethnographic cross-cultural research, it could be expected that in the school as well as other social contexts, those students whose lives accommodate to the existing social system, i.e., those students who seek rather than reject assimilation and by their accommodation demonstrate that they have not looked beyond that which is clearly given and available, tend to be more successful on school measures of success because they are less hostile and more submissive than those who are less accommodating or assimilative. A discussion of the responses of Black adolescents to racial and social stratification in the school context with a strong emphasis on cultural inversion is considered next.

III. BLACK SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL INVERSION

The seriousness of Black children's low performance on school measures of success has spawned several competing explanations, including one which is variously known as the cultural conflict or cultural discontinuities theory. Widely subscribed to by anthropologists and other social scientists, the central claim of this explanation is that the failure Black children experience in the school context is a result of conflict which surfaces in the child due to the unwillingness of school personnel to incorporate the competencies the child brings from his/her home and the immediate community. Instead, what the school does, it is argued, is impose the values and norms of the larger society on the child. Consequently, the child fails in the school context because

he/she is compelled to learn in terms of dominant group language, cognition, motivation, values and social skills, all of which are frequently alien to the child's enculturation experiences (Baratz and Baratz 1970; R. Cohen 1969; Hale 1977, 1981; Inkeles 1968).

Like the explanations which predate it, i.e., the evolutionary, genetic, educational equality and cultural deprivation theories, the cultural conflict theory attempts to explicate the factors responsible for the lower performance of Black children on school measures of success. However, like the earlier explanations of Black school failure, there appear to be several major problems associated with this explanation: (1) it fails to look at the social function of Black schooling in America; consequently, it does not explore the relationship between educational requirements of Black schooling and the social positions that Black Americans hold in the corporate economy, and the nation's system of racial stratification; (2) it is ahistorical in that it does not consider how the experience and social heritage of Black people in America have affected their perceptions of and responses to education (Anderson 1973, 1975; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Mann 1975; Ogbu 1974, 1978, 1981; Spivey 1978; Spring 1974; see also Raskin 1974); (3) it does not adequately consider the hierarchical structure of the larger social structure and its impact on the total life experiences of the Black child; and , most importantly, (4) it does not adequately consider the nature nor the distinctive aspects of Black cultural discontinuities as causal factors in the lower performance of Black children on school measures of success. These omissions can be illuminating for two primary reasons: (1) The type of schooling or education any society provides its young is directly related to the various types of competencies required by the social system (Cohen 1971; LeVine 1967; Ogbu 1977, 1978, 1981) for, as Cohen

(1971:25) makes clear, a function of schools is to "shape the minds" of future adults so that they can fill predetermined social and economic roles (see also Spring 1974; Tyack 1966); and (2) the mere existence of cultural differences between Black and white people is insufficient as an explanation for Black school failure. Ogbu (1974) has argued, quite convincingly, that cultural dissonance per se is inadequate as an explanation for the lower performance of Black children, especially given the fact that Japanese-Americans, Chinese-Americans and other Americans with linguistic and cultural differences similar in scope and consequences to those of Black Americans do quite well in school. Hence, another major weakness of the cultural conflict explanation: it is devoid of the specific structural and contextual factors giving rise to Black Americans' cultural traditions.

John Ogbu suggests (1974, 1978, 1982) that cultural inversion is part of the oppositional process or processes that non-dominant groups develop in response to subordination. Thus one might infer from his analysis that cultural inversion is frequently associated with castelike minority status.

Ogbu has noted that there are three types of minority groups in America: (1) Autonomous minorities who are often numerically smaller than the dominant group but who, on the other hand, are not necessarily "totally subordinated economically or politically" to the dominant group. A critical component of the interaction between autonomous minorities and dominant group members, according to Ogbu (1978:23), is that they do not use the dominant group as a reference group nor do they, as a group, necessarily desire assimilation. Unlike subordinate or caste minorities, autonomous minorities are free to pursue jobs and careers commensurate with their academic training and abilities. (2) Immigrant minorities are, according to Ogbu (1978:23), a people who have

voluntarily moved to America or some other country and, for the most part, can be accurately characterized as desirous of becoming assimilated by the host society. A key difference between the immigrant minority and the caste or subordinate minority is that the former has a homeland to which he can return if he so desires. Chinese- and Japanese-Americans are examples of immigrant minorities. (3) On the other hand, caste or subordinate minorities are, according to Ogbu (1978:23), "the polar opposite" of autonomous minorities. Viewed by the dominant or host society as "inherently inferior in all respects", caste minorities are defined (Ogbu 1978:23, quoting Berreman 1967:293) as "pariahs" who are "intrinsically polluted and are stigmatized and excluded". He goes on to note that in general the social roles open to caste minorities are rigidly limited and stratified and that they are not allowed to use the schooling they are able to obtain to compete on an equitable basis with dominant group members.

Unlike all other types of minorities, castelike minorities, according to Ogbu (1982), are distinguished from these other types in that (1) they have been incorporated into the society rather involuntarily and permanently, (2) they face a job and status ceiling, and (3) they tend to formulate their economic and social problems in terms of collective institutional discrimination, which is not perceived to be a temporary state. This social history, in Ogbu's view, profoundly affects the way they view this country and their response to its system of schooling. The following discussion is intended to illuminate the response Black Americans, a caste minority, has made to the American system of schooling.

As noted earlier, the conventional types of cultural explanations of Black social reality suggest that cultural inversion is indicated. Moreover, the ethnographic data on the observations of Black children are more in line with the cultural inversion than the cultural conflict explanation.

Robert Williams (1972, cited in Gallimore, Boggs and Jordan 1974) argues, quite convincingly, that the culture of a non-dominant or disparaged group is composed, in part at least, of defenses against intrusion and manipulation by the host or dominant group. Further, he claims that members of non-dominant groups are resistant to efforts to eliminate from the existing cultural repertoire their unique cultural practices and influences. Hence, the school or any other dominant institution which has as either an explicit or an implicit goal the elimination or eradication of non-dominant group cultural practices and influences is likely to find conscious resistance by the entire cultural group or select members of that group. Since, as Howard (1974) notes, the official ideology of the American society is assimilation, an implicit goal of the public system of schooling is to eliminate cultural or ethnic disparities so that each individual in the society can compete on equal terms for the rewards that the system has to offer (see also Cohen 1970:110, 1971:25). However, the reality is that the realization of this goal is hampered by the limitations inherent in the American castelike social structure, which necessitates a system of schooling to meet the specific roles open to the adult workers of the various albeit unequal social groups as well as the response of the various caste groups to their specific ecological conditions.

This refusal to submit to domination is cultural inversion; it is a response to the perceived social reality. Essentially, it is both a conscious and an unconscious effort on the part of the members of the group to ensure the survival of the group. In fact, it parallels Holt's (1972:154) analysis of linguistic "inversion" in Black communication which, she maintains, enabled Black people, even during slavery, to "deceive and manipulate whites without penalty". For example, Holt (1972) describes the various meanings Blacks have

attached to the derogatory term "nigger". She points out that when used by white Americans, the term has only a derogatory meaning. However, when used by Black people, the term has multiple meanings. It is often used as a "term of affection, admiration, approval" (Holt 1972:154). Hence, as Black people inverted it, language which was originally intended to denigrate took on positive connotations--an inversion of its original intent.

Similarly, cultural inversion in the Black community is intended to serve as a "protective process, understood and shared by blacks". Its existence suggests group solidarity and group cohesion. At its base are what appear, on the surface, to be contradictory behaviors--resistance, agreement and avoidance (RAA)--to the efforts of the dominant society to eliminate the existing cultural configuration in the Black community. It not only enables the person or group to survive, but it also enables him or them to do so with their integrity and values intact despite the contrary demands placed upon them.

Historically, enslaved Blacks frequently resorted to behaviors which made them "appear to but not to" when interacting with the slave masters. Rose (1949:15) notes that the slaves did everything they could to "thwart the white masters, even in the most petty ways". He notes that "getting a little extra food, stealing a bit of finery, evading an hour's work, (and) slowing down on the job" were everyday expressions of subterfuge (see also Caulfield 1972).

In a more recent analysis of Black American life and culture, Melvin Williams (1981) maintains that in order to survive in a social system which systematically denies him access to the highly valued symbols of success, e.g. wealth and power, the "genuine" Black must "deny, defile and defy" the norms of the dominant society. Suggesting that there are three (3) major groupings of Black Americans in the Belmars of America--Mainstreamers, Spurious and

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Genuine, with the Genuine being the largest and the only group in harmony with the existing social reality, Williams (1981) argues, in effect, that the "genuine" Blacks have a distinctive cultural pattern. Further, he maintains that the distinctive set of cultural practices and influences is, in part at least, a "response to the nature of oppression in the larger society". Hence the "denial, defiance and defilement" of mainstream values is an attempt on the part of the most opporessed component of the Black population in Belmar to survive with some degree of integrity. Williams (1974) found a similar response operating in a Black Pentecostal church where church members refused to associate or participate in the activities, other than work, of the larger society. Viewing themselves as the "despised few", they sought group affiliation rather than individual advancement.

What are the implications of all this for the performance of Black American high school students? Some studies of Black students in school suggest that they too are participants in the inversion of the valued norms of the larger society.

According to Williams (1981), it is the "genuine" Black youth whose socialization varies most widely from that of the wider society. Indeed, he claims that it is the "genuine" youth who is more likely to see most clearly the rampant "hypocrisy in the school"; he is also the more likely to resist the efforts of school personnel to have him conform to the assimilation ideology of the wider society and by extension the public school system. Williams' (1981) analysis of Black youths' response to social disparagement parallels DeVos' (1980:112) assertion that "differences in cultural backgrounds produce differences in both cognitive patterns and forms of social interaction". DeVos (1980, 1982) notes the importance of the peer group in either buttressing a pattern of resistance

to learning or facilitating the "permeability of learning experiences". In the case of Japanese-Americans, DeVos (1982) insists that the peer group of even the so-called "Nisei" children of Japanese immigrants in the 1930s, served as a facilitator of learning in the school context. This peer-group pattern has continued in the Japanese culture.

The peer group among the "genuine" Black youth Williams (1981) studied is quite unlike the peer group of the Japanese-Americans whom DeVos discusses. The peer group of the Black youths Williams studied buttresses a pattern of resistance to learning in the school context. In certain areas in DeVos' (1980) analysis, incompetence in certain social skills is often used as a criterion for group membership. Conversely, competence in areas that are perceived to be outside the purview of the group is often used as a criterion for group exclusion. Hence, in DeVos' analysis, "nonlearning" and group identity are highly correlated. Further, he maintains that "affective dissonance" produces "contradicting emotional states calling into use psychological defense mechanisms such as denial, repression, rejection, or displacement". Essentially, DeVos (1980) suggests that what one learns in the school context is (1) subject to peer group influence, probably to a much larger degree than we as anthropologists are aware; (2) likely to reflect whether that peer influence abets learning or acts as an inhibitor of learning; and (3) likely to incorporate the mastery of skills or subject matter that is not psychologically at variance with the individual's sense of who he or she is.

In a study of a desegregated border state public school, Petroni (1970) and Petroni and Hirsch (1970) found that Black students subdivided themselves into three major sub-groups "on the basis of a life-style or self-presentation which (was) announced by (their) behavior". According to Petroni and Hirsch

(1970), these groupings were (1) the Black elite (one) who were considered to be at the top of the Black social ladder by both Blacks and whites, achieved good grades, took school seriously, attended white parties, and generally identified themselves with what they described as the values of the "white community"; (2) the Black elite (two) who were more actively concerned with being a part of a prejudiced-against group, they seemed, according to Petroni and Hirsch (1970), to be more identified with the injustices that have traditionally characterized white attitudes toward Blacks and, unlike the Black elite group one, were actively trying to do something about changing these conditions; and (3) the Black militants who identified their concern as "involving primarily economic and political power" (author's emphasis); they were not academic competitors with white students; they did not run for school offices, did not take accelerated courses, did not join school clubs, and refused to participate in sports.

Petroni and Hirsch (1970) described the first sub-group as being considered "Uncle Toms or White Negroes" by other Black students, largely because it was thought that their behavior and attitudes suggested that they disowned their Black heritage. For the most part sons and daughters of middle-class or professional families, these students were not totally free of the effects of social disparagement, but had not experienced it to the same degree as some other Black students.

In this school with a predominantly white student body, there were, according to Petroni (1970), strong pressures from the Black students to keep other Black students who wished to participate in what were considered "white activities" from doing so. These pressures included not only name calling but physical threats as well.

Petroni and Hirsch (1970) also claim that the majority of the students they interviewed who were described as non-"elite" Blacks, "questioned the motives of fellow Black students who were high academic achievers". Moreover, he claims that non-"elite" Black students perceived Black students who strove to make good grades as trying "to make other black students look bad" or as "trying to be white". A student identified as a Black militant was asked in an interview session to "give me a definition of an Uncle Tom". The student offered the following definition:

> If Negroes wanted to walk out of school, the white people would tell an Uncle Tom what they wanted him to tell other Negroes to get them to stay. He would help the white person to get the Negro kids to stay. He's also a person who sucks up to the white people all the time. He helps white people get their prestige. He'd rather drive a white person to California than take a Negro across the street. There's a kid at school who's an Uncle Tom--well, quite a few kids at school are Uncle Toms. I'll give you an example that might give you an idea of what I mean by an Uncle Tom. All of the Negroes got together, and we had this big plan that we were going to walk out of this assembly. It was a demonstration that we were going to have. We weren't going to have any trouble; all that we were going to do was to walk out and boycott this assembly. Well, this Uncle Tom told the principal what our plans were, and the principal cancelled the assembly. You can't walk out when there isn't an assembly; that killed the whole plan. That kid is an Uncle Tom (Petroni and Hirsch 1970:52).

Included among the Uncle Tom or so-called white activities were participation in the girls' or boys' pep club, the speech and debate club, college preparatory curriculum, student government, the senior play or similar activities. Participation in these activities earned one the label "Tomming". Petroni (1970) quotes one Black student, identified as a militant, who described such students in the following manner:

> The type of Negroes that join that type of thing (pep teams) look down on other Negroes anyway. They conform to the white ways. They wouldn't vote for a Negro cheerleader. They won't be individuals. Their idea is to get

> a good education and try to be as white as possible. They're what we call "white Negroes". They're not for the Negroes; they're for the whites. They've learned white ways. They want to be white and they act white. Negroes don't like this kind of Negro. We call them "white Negroes". Usually these are the wealthier kids. They want to be white (quoted in Petroni 1970:262-263).

On the other hand, Black students in this same school who participated in sports activities were not subjected to such pressures, even when they participated in sports activities when the Black students were boycotting school in order to protest the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King. Their participation in the designated activities was not considered a breach of group solidarity because athletes were depending upon their performance in the particular sports event to obtain a scholarship to college. Petroni (1970) claims that athletes are probably exempt from the "Uncle Tom" epithet "because athletic achievement brings credit to the whole group, while intellectual achievement does not". Further, Petroni claims that ironically the hyperconcern with "Uncle Tomism" may in fact reinforce that which most Black students desire to see discontinued: limitations on what they can do as adult members of the existing social structure.

In summary, Petroni's (1970) and Petroni and Hirsch's (1970) data seem to support Devos' claim of "selective permeability" in that in this desegregated setting, as much as they were able to make free choices, Black students elected not to choose courses and/or activities which conflicted with their collective notion of what it means to be Black. Those students who chose to behave in ways that were incongruent with the majority of the Black student population were pressured to conform to the group norms or were ostracized by the group.

IV. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE CAPITAL HIGH STUDY

The preliminary findings emerging from the author's current field work suggest areas of similarity as well as areas of dissimilarity with the Petroni and Hirsch findings. Unlike Petroni (1970) and Petroni and Hirsch (1970), I am conducting my research in a predominantly Black senior high school--about 99% Black--in a low-income section of this city. Tentatively identified as Capital High, the school has a 4-tier curriculum--two special programs, the regular curriculum where most of the nearly 2000 students are centered, and a program for those students in need of special education. Additionally, where there are areas of overlap in the regular program and the two special academic programs, students are grouped according to performance on standardized examinations. For example, those students in English 050 are performing well below grade level; those in English 051 are at or just below grade level; and those in English 052 are performing above grade level. This is necessary, it is argued, because all students are required to take English in each grade level, and they benefit from the homogeneous groupings. The fact that the school is predominantly Black, both in terms of students and in the composition of the teaching staff, may account for some of the differences I have observed in my preliminary findings and the findings reported by Petroni.

In the selection of courses, I have observed that senior students in the regular curriculum are urged by their counselors not to drop courses that the students generally feel are difficult--Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Computer Programming, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, and all foreign languages. Unfortunately, however, students generally do not follow the suggestions of their counselors in this matter; instead, they drop the so-called difficult courses once they have been given a "Letter of Understanding" apprising them

of the needed Carnegie Units for graduation. In the rare instances when a senior student does not have the courage to go against the suggestion of his counselor and remains in the difficult course or courses which are not needed to complete the requirements for graduation, the student resorts to behaviors which make him or her "appear to but not to": (1) he/she continues his or her enrollment in the course(s) but rarely goes to class, thus virtually assuring his lack of success in that class; or (2) he/she takes the body to class but deposits the mind somewhere other than the classroom. Since class attendance is so important in teachers' assessment of students at Capital High, going to class every day enhances the possibility that students availing themselves of the latter option will at least earn a final grade of D if they put forth minimal effort in the class.

In the regular curriculum of the school, the operative student norm appears to be to take only that which is required for graduation. While I have not heard anyone referred to as an "Uncle Tom", students who are assigned courses or who sign up for more courses than they need for graduation are generally thought of as "strange" or "crazy". However, these few students are usually able to convince their peers that they were unable to get out of the class or classes by attributing their deviation from the norm to the intractability of of their counselor: "Man, Mr. Collins would not let me drop this class."

There is some evidence to suggest that the perception of the teaching staff is that the majority of the students in the regular curriculum program might go to college, but are not likely to further their academic training. For example, one member of the Math Department maintains that the expectations of the teachers at the school are "extremely low" for students in the regular program. He also laments the fact that there is virtually no emphasis in the

regular curriculum on mastery of the physical sciences, an area where students perform well below the norm on standardized examinations administered at the school, particularly the CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills). He is particularly incensed with the well-established practice of denying students the opportunity to take Algebra I because they did not do well in the arithmetic courses they took in elementary and junior high school. He decries this thinking and maintains that there is not necessarily a significant relationship between one's performance in arithmetic and his/her ability to perform successfully in algebra. This teacher is unusual in that he thinks that the range of courses, as well as the expectations for students, are too low.

Unlike students in the regular curriculum, students in the special programs, while small in number (the larger of the two special programs has just over 400 of the nearly 2000 students enrolled in the school), are subjected to a curriculum which far exceeds the minimal requirements of the regular curriculum. For example, in the regular curriculum, students scheduled to graduate in June of 1983 are required to have taken only one course in the natural sciences and one course in mathematics between the 10th and 12th grades in order to graduate; they are not required to have taken a single course in foreign language. In contradistinction, in the larger of the two special programs, students who are anticipating graduation in June of 1983 are required to complete a math course and a science course at each grade level--10th, 11th, 12th; they are also required to take two years of foreign language. While it should be noted that this list of requirements will change next academic year, this is the situation this year and has been the case for several years.

Like those of Petroni (1970) and Petroni and Hirsch (1970), my initial observations suggest that all students at Capital High are free to participate

in the sports activities at the school. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that sports events are as important in the scheme of things as the core curriculum. A wide range of sports are available: volleyball, soccer, basketball (varsity as well as intramural), football, and track. Similar sports, with the exception of football, are available to females as well as males.

At this point in my research, my interactions with students have been both limited and superficial. Nevertheless, my observations and participation have been intense and wide-ranging. Working from the counselors' offices, I have been able to observe much of the social life of the school. These observations have led me to conclude that the subtle opposition of cultural inversion is an integral part of the social relationships and social interactions at Capital High. Students' behaviors suggest RAA--resistance, agreement and avoidance. Avoidance is evident in the high rate of absenteeism. In order to prevent or minimize the conflict with teachers whom they do not like or with whom they cannot effectively communicate, students in the regular program consistently "cut" their assigned classes. While they dutifully come to homeroom in order to "appear to but not to", they avoid classes where they are fairly certain that they will be involved in a verbal duel with the teacher. In this connection, students are constantly coming to their counselors' offices to request a change in their class schedules because there is a personality conflict with the teacher of one or some of their classes. For example, a student whom I shall call Randy came to his counselor's office recently in order to urge her to change his schedule because "Me and Ms. Coffee don't get along." During an earlier visit, his request for a change in his class schedule was denied. Since then he has not returned to this Reading class (students whose

skills are well below grade level usually take the necessary English requirement in a course identified as Reading), which further diminishes the possibility that he will obtain a passing grade. When I asked him why he had not been to class in more than three weeks, he described the invariable conflict with the teacher which threatened his already precarious academic standing. His actions were quite puzzling because he had assured his counselor that he would make a real effort to get along with the teacher and he would also go to class.

Another area suggesting the subtle opposition of cultural inversion is the pervasive resistance to studying and activities which might imply studying. For example, a student invited to participate in my research study who earned all A's last year and who, according to his counselor, "is extremely bright", asked how long I was planning to stay at their homes when I visited them after school. When I suggested "until after the completion of their homework assignments", he noted that "If you saw how little homework I do, you would not believe that I make the grades that I do." Another very bright student who is also a friend of his, also denies that he studies, although the counselor assured me that, unlike the first student, the second student must study. While the general norm in the regular program appears to be geared toward "appear(ing) to but not to", I was surprised to see the students in one of the special programs also proclaiming that they desired to "appear to but not to".

The library at Capital High is underutilized for this very same reason: Utilization of the library implies studiousness, an unacceptable behavior at Capital High.

Nevertheless, resistance and avoidance behaviors are cloaked in agreement, which personifies the effort to "appear to but not to". For example, teachers and counselors often attempt to get students to take their classes seriously by

requesting an individual conference with them after school, and/or by calling the parents. These conferences produce students' assurances that they will change their classroom behavior, but which prove to be futile the very next day. The principal recently remarked to a student whom he had allowed to return to school: "Against my better judgment, I gave you a second chance. Now look at you." The apparent motive of the student was to "appear to but not to".

In summary, my observations at Capital High suggest that students at the school are (1) extremely peer-group conscious, making it virtually impossible to get students to behave in ways not condoned by their peers; (2) concerned with the image they present in school, leading them to resort to behaviors which make them "appear to but not to" conform to the norms of the school; and (3) selective in the courses they choose to study, suggesting that how they feel about a particular subject area affects both their behavior and performance. Their rampant lack of effort in English, for example, is a case in point.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this analysis I argued that whether a group's response to conquest and domination is submission or resistance, i.e. assimilation or non-assimilation, has enormous implications for the school performance as well as school behaviors of the affected students. Further, I suggested that in response to their subordinate group status, Black people have inverted the dominant group's decision to exclude them from the center of the social system by refusing their efforts at integration. This inversion has led them to refuse to seek assimilation or acceptance in the dominant social structure--a reversal of their former goal.

Secondly, I intimated that the conventional explanation of cultural conflict widely subscribed to by anthropologists and other social scientists is correct in (1) pointing to observed cultural differences in Black and white students; and (2) pointing out that these differences lead to school failure. However, the problem lies in not explaining why Black cultural differences, but not cultural differences associated with other subordinate groups, lead to school failure. I suggest that Black people have resorted to cultural inversion. Cultural inversion implies the unwillingness of Black people to relinquish their group identity. The behaviors of Black students in Petroni's study and in the findings emerging from my own study of students at Capital High, suggest that the subtle opposition of cultural inversion enhances the group's survival but also diminishes social mobility. In fact, Petroni and Hirsch (1970) claim that the problem facing Black students who desire "to substitute their OWN (author's emphasis) goals for white goals" is that they have not been able to construct anything that begins to satisfy this desire.

Finally, cultural inversion may also explain why remedial programs, including school integration which is intended to eliminate cultural groups, do not facilitate higher school performance.

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